
MEDICAL EXAMINER ACTIVITY

The staff members of the Medical Examiner's Office are involved in a wide variety of activities commensurate with the mission of the office including responding to and investigating the scene of death, performing postmortem examinations, certifying the cause and manner of death, and providing information and assistance to families. Investigators, who are familiar with the emotional trauma of an unexpected death, communicate directly with the family as do the Medical Examiner pathologists, who review their findings with the families in order to clarify the many questions that accompany a sudden loss of life.

Many cases brought to the Medical Examiner's Office are dealt with in a routine manner, that is, the identity of the deceased is known and next-of-kin can be readily contacted to decide on final arrangements for the deceased, and to assist in the disposition of personal property associated with the scene of death. However, there are frequent cases which are difficult to resolve. In these deaths at least one of the items above is missing or very difficult to establish. Identification of deceased may require tracing of dental, medical or police records or some individuals may have died leaving no next-of-kin or next-of-kin far removed. Ensuring that all leads have been exhausted in pursuit of next-of-kin can be a very time-consuming but ultimately rewarding effort.

The postmortem examination on each decedent includes the preservation of various body fluids and tissues for microscopic and toxicologic analysis. Photographs are taken of the external and internal portions of the examination, which are available for review at a later date if needed. Photographic documentation is also an essential item in those cases where the pathologist must provide court testimony.

Medical Examiner pathologists and investigators provide testimony in court and at depositions. Staff participate in meetings with police, other interested physicians, and attorneys (both prosecuting and defending) in a variety of criminal and civil cases. A recent addition to the duties of the Chief Medical Examiner is expert medical consultation and testimony in cases involving nonfatal domestic violence assaults. Autopsy reports and related data from individual investigations are provided to agencies such as police and Labor & Industries, to prosecuting attorneys, and to other agencies including the Drug Enforcement Administration and the Consumer Product Safety Commission. Reports on drug caused deaths are sent to the Drug Abuse Warning Network (DAWN). Case information is entered into annual databases of the Medical Examiner's Office.

Medical Examiner investigations require frequent contact between the Medical Examiner's Office and various media personnel. Staff are skilled in responding to the media inquiries which occur daily. The Medical Examiner pathologists and other staff participate in a variety of medical conferences, and provide information on a regular basis to law enforcement and medical personnel on various aspects of the role and function of the Medical Examiner's Office.

The data collected and presented in this and other Medical Examiner annual reports also provide baseline information for further analysis. Medical Examiner staff analyze data to study relevant death investigation topics which have applications in such fields as law enforcement, medicine, law, social sciences and injury prevention. Examples include infant mortality, teenage suicide, child abuse, effects of positional restraint, investigation of vehicular traffic accidents, and investigation of anesthetic deaths. In addition, the Office participates in teaching medical students, pathology residents, medics and law enforcement personnel.

In 1999, staff participated as speakers at universities, conferences, and training seminars for law enforcement, medical, legal, and social service personnel in the following presentations and lectures:

Richard Harruff, MD, PhD:

- "SIDS - What Every Professional Should Know":
Harrison Hospital, Bremerton, WA, Oct. 29, 1999.
SIDS Foundation of WA, Des Moines, WA, April 20, 1999.
King County Prosecutor's Office, Seattle, WA, Feb. 20, 1999.
- "Forensic Investigation of Deaths: Distinguishing Suicide from Homicide",
American Association of Critical Care Nurses, Puget Sound Chapter, Bellevue, WA, Oct. 26, 1999.
- "Injuries in Traffic Crashes":
Washington State Patrol, Bellevue, WA, Sept. 24, 1999.
Advanced Accident Investigation School, Lynnwood, WA, Sept. 15, 1999.
- "SIDS Risk Factors and Epidemiology", South County Dept. of Social and Health Services, Child Protective Services, Auburn, WA, Oct. 1999.
- "What SIDS Is and Isn't", Clallam County Health and Human Services, Port Angeles, WA, June 22, 1999.
- "Strangulation Injuries":
Tukwila Police Dept., Tukwila, WA, June 17, 1999.
Seattle Police Dept., Seattle, WA, June 16, 1999.
Kirkland Police Dept., Kirkland, WA, June 10, 1999.
Bellevue Police Dept., Bellevue, WA, June 9, 1999.
King County Sheriff's Office, Kent, WA, May 18, 1999.
King County Prosecutor's Office, Seattle, WA, March 25, 1999.
- "Female Homicide", International Association of Forensic Nurses, Pacific Northwest Chapter, Seattle, WA, May 15, 1999.
- "Role of Medical Examiner in Homicide Investigation", Criminal Justice Training Center, Burien, WA, April 27, 1999.

- "Autopsies and the Medical Examiner's Office", King County Prosecutor's Office, Seattle, WA, Feb. 20, 1999.
- "Bereavement Support Training for SIDS and Infant Loss", Public Health - Seattle & King County, Renton, WA, Jan. 13, 1999.
- King County and Washington State Child Death Review Committee.

Kathy Taylor, PhD:

- "Forensic Anthropology", Washington State Society of Radiologic Technologists, April 15, 1999.
- "Determination of Postmortem Interval", Presented with Nicole Bourque, Washington State Search and Rescue Conference, May 1999.
- "Scene Recovery and Investigation", Forensic Anthropology class, Central Washington University, Ellensburg, WA, June 29, 1999.
- "Outdoor Scene Processing and Body Recovery", Snohomish County Medical Examiner's Office, Everett, WA, August 1999.

Jason Berman:

- "Role of the Medical Examiner's Office":
Black Diamond Fire Dept., Black Diamond, WA, Oct. 1999.
Federal Way Police Explorers, Federal Way, WA, Oct. 1999.
Renton Fire Dept./King County Medic 1, Renton, WA, Sept. 1999.
- "DWI Mock Accident Scene", Kent School District, Kent, WA, June 1999.

Paul R. Spence, MD, Richard C. Harruff, MD, PhD, Katherine M. Taylor, PhD,
Imka Lavinder, DO, & Donald T. Reay, MD:

- "Skull Fractures in Infants and Young Children", American Academy of Forensic Sciences Annual Meeting, Orlando, FL, Feb. 1999.

Nicole M. Bourque, BA, Anthony J. Wilson, MBChB, Richard C. Harruff, MD, PhD,
John Ephron, MD, & Carlin Ridpath, MD:

- "Estimating Ammunition Type, Caliber, and Direction of Trajectory From Radiologic Features and Post Mortem Observations", American Academy of Forensic Sciences Annual Meeting, Orlando, FL, Feb. 1999.

Don Halberg:

- "Role of the Medical Examiner's Office at Airplane Accidents", Alaska Airlines Emergency Response Team, SeaTac, WA, Feb. 1999.
- "Introduction to Incident Command: Mass Fatality Response", Medicolegal Training & Investigation Seminar, Everett, WA, Dec. 1999.

In 1999, Medical Examiner staff were responsible for the following publications:

Brundage, S., Harruff, R., Jurkovich, G., & Maier, R.: "The Epidemiology of Thoracic Aortic Injuries in Pedestrians", The Journal of Trauma: Injury, Infection, and Critical Care, Vol. 45, No. 6, pp.1010-1014, Dec. 1998.

Raven, K.P., Reay, D.T., & Harruff, R.: "Artifactual Injuries of the Larynx Produced by Resuscitative Intubation", American Journal of Forensic Medical Pathology, 20(1):31-6, March, 1999.

Grossman, D., Reay, D. T., & Baker, S.: "Self-inflicted and Unintentional Firearm Injuries Among Children and Adolescents," Archives of Pediatric and Adolescent Medicine, Vol. 153, pp 875-878, Aug. 1999.

Fulginiti, L.C., Czuzak, M.H., & Taylor, K.M.: "Scatter versus Impact During Aircraft Crashes: Implications for Forensic Anthropologists", Broken Bone: Anthropological Analysis of Blunt Force Trauma, Alison Galloway, Charles C. Thomas Publisher, December 1999.

Taylor, K.M.: Book Note Review: Cambridge Encyclopedia of Human Paleopathology, Auferhede, A.C. & Rodriguez-Martin, C., including a dental chapter by Langsjoen, O., American Antiquity, Vol. 64, No. 3, July 1999.

Berman, J., et al: Various articles, *Fire-Med Net*, Thurston/King Counties, WA, & Marion County, OR, 1999.

Table 12-1 **Weekly Variation of Deaths Investigated by the King County Medical Examiner's Office**

	TOTAL
Number of weeks studied	52
Mean number of cases assumed	28.86
Maximum in any one week	42
Minimum in any one week	18

Table 12-2 **Weekly Variation of Autopsies Performed by the King County Medical Examiner's Office**

	TOTAL
Number of weeks studied	52
Mean number of autopsies	19.87
Maximum in any one week	34
Minimum in any one week	12

Organization of the King County Medical Examiner Division 1999

